

BAD MANNERS

By Morgan Robertson



BE it said at the start that I always liked Manners, and none of the strictures upon him and his conduct that appears in this story is mine. As a simple old fellow with a keen sense of the intricate in life's comedy, I have made it a rule for years never to contradict, or disagree, or overrule any one, because of the shortness of the life that is left me and my abiding desire for peace, and because, should I do so, I might lose the only pleasure I have—that of laughing at the foibles and the follies of my younger fellow men and women. And so it came about that I was the recipient of every opinion, prejudice, and criticism aroused by Manners, from every occupant of that exclusive summer hotel.

He was a tall, big-shouldered individual, not very talkative, none too cultured—in summer-hotel etiquette—with a pleasant, inscrutable, mind-your-own-business expression to his face, a pair of steel-gray eyes that seemed to pierce you as you talked to him, and a hand that was big, powerful, and scarred, with bent fingers that he could not straighten, and which were as square as fence-pickets and as big at the ends as at the middle.

A graduate working man, surely, and utterly out of place in that hotel. So said Old Lady Summers, and I agreed with her.

He dressed well; but, for that matter, any one with money can dress well; and, as regards choice and taste in neckwear and jewelry, this can be supplied by any haberdasher's salesman. So his appearance was no real index of his worth. It was something else—something intangible, indefinable, indicating either in its presence or in its absence, that Manners was not a gentleman.

Most of the men smoked cigarettes, as gentlemen should, but Manners smoked a pipe, and, though careful not to blow smoke among the ladies, he was yet an insult to his artistic surroundings, and his habit of walking up and down the veranda like a caged bear, his boot-heels coming down hard on the boarding, with that execrable pipe in his teeth, was specially irritating to the nerves of all. The landlord was appealed to, but in vain; he evidently liked Manners.

By this time Manners was being talked about and—I think it was young Badger's wit that supplied the prefix—we called him Bad Manners; always, however, in the third person. I do not think that any of us, old or young, male or female, could stand before him in the spirit of criticism. But, labeled now, his other shortcomings, real and imagined, were called under review, and poor Manners must have wondered why his ears burned so steadily.

There were two other young persons among us who have a vital place in this story—Miss Ellsworth and Mr. Haw-

ley. Miss Ellsworth was a tall young woman, almost as tall as Manners, with a Greek profile, a figure that was a symphony in curves, and a personality so winning, so charming, so utterly natural and unaffected, as to even impress an old fellow like me. I had even volunteered to run an errand for her, and was pleased with her acquiescence. She was a kindergarten teacher, penniless beyond her salary; and only the kindness of wealthy relatives permitted her to enjoy her vacation among exclusive Us.

Mr. Hawley was a person of importance. He had money, and an educated talent in spending it. He had an automobile, a steam-yacht, a sailing schooner yacht, a house in town and several around at the world's garden spots; and he had a fair allowance of brains, for he knew that Miss Ellsworth was a treasure worth more than his possessions, and he went systematically at the task of adding her to them. He sent for his automobile, and they took long rides; he would have brought on his steam-yacht but that there was no dock or anchorage in the vicinity with water enough for her, and so he sent for his sailing yacht, meanwhile keeping Miss Ellsworth supplied with flowers and candy enough for all the women in our party—for Miss Ellsworth was generous.

All of the younger men had paid more or less attention to this splendid girl, but now they gave way to the superior campaigning of Hawley. So we were all of us very much surprised to see poor Bad Manners enter the lists.

He gave her no flowers or candy, nor did he ask her out riding or sailing; he simply displayed a strong desire to be near her, and would join any group that contained her, and remain until it broke up. This form of compliment seemed to amuse her at first, but it finally grew embarrassing, and she would be the first to leave the party. Then Manners became the second to leave, following her until brought up by some obstacle, happening or convention that he could not ignore. He was like a huge, bashful boy, trying to

arouse his courage; and he finally succeeded. It was at a time when I was within hearing, standing just inside the parlor window, when he and Miss Ellsworth met on the veranda without. And Old Lady Summers stood at the other window.

"Good evening, Miss Ellsworth," he said, taking his pipe from his mouth. His voice was somewhat choked.

"Good evening, Mr. Manners," she responded sweetly.

"Miss Ellsworth," he continued, "I know I'm a rough man, not of your kind; but I love you. Will you marry me?"

She started back, in some trepidation; for he had extended his arms.

"Why, Mr. Manners!" she exclaimed. "Why—no—no—certainly not."

He bowed his head, put his pipe in his pocket, and turned away. Miss Ellsworth looked after him a moment, then turned and looked at me; then Old Lady Summers stepped out on the veranda.

"I think you are an inquisitive old lady," said Miss Ellsworth, as she went down the steps to the lawn.

I wondered if she meant me or Old Lady Summers.

However, it was Old Lady Summers that retailed the news to the rest; and everybody watched him carefully, to see how it affected him. He smoked a little harder for a while, and kept more to himself; then he seemed to throw it off and become reconciled. He joined our little groups as before, and tried to be friendly. But Miss Ellsworth, while saying nothing, displayed a marked distaste for his society, and would gracefully leave a group before he arrived.

Hawley was too well bred to make any comment whatever, and with Manners out of the way, he could afford to be friendly. He warmed to him, and they talked about his yacht, Hawley explaining nautical matters in general, and Manners expressing a keen interest in them and a genuine admiration for Hawley's erudition; for there was no doubt whatever that Hawley, a member of the three largest clubs,

and an ex-commodore of one, was an authority in yachting circles. He knew by sight the private signal of every member of the three clubs, and was a past-master in cruising and racing etiquette.

But all this was in painful contrast with Manners' ignorance. He did not like the sea, he said. He always got seasick, and it was unpleasant to be away from land. Still, he liked to talk about ships and the sea, when he found a man able to inform him.

But his questions and comments were distressingly foolish, and here is a sample of one of their talks, which even Miss Ellsworth was compelled to listen to, being wedged in with no chance of escape by the chairs of Old Lady Summers and Mrs. Blair.

"Always thought," ventured Manners, in answer to a half rhapsody from Hawley on the joys of a life on the ocean wave, "that I might have made a good sailor if it wasn't for the seasickness, and if I could only get to like it. When I was a boy I had my heart set upon it."

"Why didn't you go?" said Hawley. "I tell you there's nothing like the sea for clearing away the cobwebs on your mind. A ten-mile sail out where the wind blows is better than a month's vacation. And a sailor, who spends his life at sea, is bigger, broader, and stronger than other men just for this very reason. The salt winds blow through him, disinfecting his brain, and toughening his body."

"Yes, I can imagine they do," commented Manners dryly; "and it's all right, I suppose, if he has good warm clothes on, and the boat don't rock enough to make him seasick."

"Oh, nonsense," laughed Hawley. "Seasick! Why, that never lasts long. You just wait till the yacht comes. We'll go out in a gale, and with two reefs in the fore and three in the main, and nothing forward but the jib with the bonnet off, we'll pound into a head sea, and I'll warrant that before the wind dies down you'll get over your seasickness."

"Do you think so?" queried Man-

ners. "I should like to. But what is a reef, and what is the fore, and the main? I only know one kind of bonnet—that contraption there on Mrs. Blair's head."

Mrs. Blair sniffed. It was unmistakably rude.

"The bonnet on the jib," said Hawley good-humoredly, "is the lowest part of it, which is secured to the upper by a lacing. It is a quick way to reef; just cast off your lacing, lower away the halliards, haul down your tack, and hook up your sheet."

"Tack and sheet—halliards—fore and main," said Manners. "It's all Greek. What does fore and main mean?"

"The foremast and the mainmast—as a generic appellation referring to the sails, ropes, and fittings of these two masts."

"And the poles that stick up are masts, are they not?" asked Manners. "Yes."

"And the sheets—they must be the sails?"

"Not at all. That is a very common mistake of landmen. A sheet is a rope, often in the form of a tackle—that is, a rope rove through blocks—which hauls down the after, or lee clew of a sail. The tack is its opposite; it hauls down or confines the forward clew."

Manners looked hopelessly tangled. "And the clew?" he asked.

"The lower corner of a sail."

"And a reef? You didn't explain that."

"A reef is a tuck," said Hawley. "We lower away the halliards, and gather in the lower part of a sail by knotting reef-points."

"Reef-points, halliards, sheets, clews, tacks, tucks. Oh, Lord," exclaimed Manners weariedly, "I'll never get it. You'll have to be patient with me, Mr. Hawley. I'm anxious to learn of these things, and I really am interested in the sea, but—the seasickness."

"I'll take that out of you," said Hawley kindly. "Just wait."

An express wagon from the village had come up, and the driver approached,

inquiring for Mr. Manners. Manners left us to receive a parcel of his favorite brand of tobacco, and the way was clear for comment and criticism.

"It is perfectly disgusting, Mr. Hawley," said Mrs. Blair, "the way you encourage that impossible man. Who is he? What is he? He seems ignorant of the ordinary conventionalities of life. Did you notice his reference to my bonnet—a contraption, he called it."

"Oh, well, never mind that," said Hawley in a conciliatory tone. "Of course, the poor fellow is commonplace, and limited by his lack of opportunities. But I rather like him. He seems anxious to improve; and that is a good point in any one."

"But he is a cad," vociferated Old Lady Summers. "Why, what do you think he did this morning? My little Fifi, who loves everybody, and who, as you know, is the dearest little creature in the world—a pure-blooded and registered Pomeranian—why, Fifi ran up to him this morning, as he sat in a chair smoking that pipe, looking for sympathy and kindness, and all he said was: 'Beat it, you mutt.'"

"Well," said Hawley, with a laugh, "perhaps he don't like dogs."

"He don't like anything that is good and lovable and decent," said Old Lady Summers.

"And what do you think," said young Smith, a cigarette fiend. "I offered him my box of cigarettes this morning, and he thankfully accepted one, saying he was out of tobacco. But he pulled out his old pipe, stripped the paper off the cigarette that I gave him, and crammed the tobacco into his pipe. What do you think of that?"

"Oh, it is no use thinking," said Old Lady Summers. "He is utterly impossible, and I vote we taboo him."

And so, Manners was taboo, from this on—only, I thought I distinguished a slight glint of resentment in Miss Ellsworth's eyes as, when the barricade was removed, she left us to dress for dinner. Old Lady Summers, Mrs. Blair, and young Smith dropped his acquaintance at once; Hawley

agreed to the boycott for a few days, but, finding no one but Manners, who was willing or able to draw him out, and possessed by a large and healthy desire to display his acquirements before some one, proved false to us; he walked the veranda with Manners, answering his foolish questions and tutoring him in the ways of the sea and of ships—all this before us all, who had no interest whatever in such matters, and as little now in Manners.

However, little by little, the taboo spread, until hardly a soul in the party would notice him except Hawley and myself; Hawley from his superior-minded, lofty and generous magnanimity toward a defeated rival who humbly acknowledged his inferiority, I from my desire for peace. I agreed with the taboo for the sake of peace; I agreed with Manners in his resentment of it for the same reason; and when he came to me, with a puzzled, doubtful expression of face, and asked me what ailed "the bunch" I could only say that nothing ailed it—that as far as I knew everything and everybody was all right. But I am an old man, through with life's battle, only anxious for peace, and a chance to laugh once in a while.

As for Miss Ellsworth, she now seemed to expand under the devotion of Hawley; a softer light came to her eyes as the days went on, and an added glow to her cheek, while her whole sweet personality emanated happiness and content—all this, however, in the absence of Manners. At sight of him she would stiffen, and grow embarrassed at once. In spite of that resentful glint I had seen in her eyes I could not but admit that Manners had mortally offended her. As for him, he would look at her on these occasions as a tied dog looks at his departing master. It was all so pitiful, and useless; I was sorry for him.

The yacht came in time, and anchored within view of the veranda. She was a shiny black schooner of two hundred tons, with clean yellow spars and the whitest of sails, carrying, besides the sailing-master, a mate and twenty men. Hawley had provisioned her for

a cruise, and immediately extended invitations to all of us to spend a week on board, sailing up the coast and back. The invitation included Manners.

It took Manners a long time to rouse up his courage. His deadly fear of seasickness was strong upon him, he explained; and while he was mentally debating the matter, the taboo rose to full pressure, and the trip was excitedly discussed, in Hawley's absence and at last in his presence.

All the ladies were unanimous—although Miss Ellsworth gave only silent acquiescence—that they could not enjoy the trip if that man Manners came along, and the gentlemen tactfully informed Hawley that Manners could be tolerated on land, where there was a chance to walk away from him; but at sea, confined by the port and starboard rails, existence with him would be unendurable. To which Hawley, to his credit, responded hotly that if they did not care to come they could stay.

Hawley's stand produced its effect. We all accepted his dictum, reconciled that there is no pleasure unmixed with pain, and we packed our grips with the necessities of the trip, satisfied that we must put up with Bad Manners and his frailties.

At this time I was wholly in accord with Hawley; I was sympathetic, sorry for Manners, and imbued by a desire to help the poor fellow to improve, not only in etiquette but in ethics. I yearned for the courage to take him by the hand and advise him that it was utterly hopeless for a man of his inferiority to aspire to the level of Miss Ellsworth. But it was Manners himself who knocked me off my altruistic pedestal, and reduced me to what I naturally am—a cold-blooded old cynic, laughing at his fellow men.

It was on the evening before we sailed. Hawley, Manners and myself had inspected the beautiful yacht through the telescope that stood on the veranda, and Manners had asked a few more foolish questions. But he suddenly changed the burden of them; he asked of the yacht's value in dollars,

and then asked Hawley if he could not give him a rate in the Consolidated Deep Water Insurance Company.

It was disgusting; to spring a business proposition on a man bent upon pleasure, entertainment, and the joys of existence. Old Lady Summers was listening in the parlor, and Hawley's reply was such as to bring gladness to her soul. At last we knew what Manners did for a living. He was an insurance solicitor. Hawley answered, politely and constrainedly, that the yacht was already insured by that company for forty thousand dollars, and Manners looked foolish, tired and embarrassed, and, with an air of defeat, left us, just as Miss Ellsworth arrived.

So, we knew, all of us, that the object of Manners' interest in nautical matters was simply a desire to secure a commission. But what a disillusioning! Manners had lost my sympathy, and I mentally washed my hands of him.

We went aboard on the following morning. Miss Ellsworth was of the party, also young Smith, Old Lady Summers, Mrs. Blair, and others, all of us united in our disapproval of Manners. Manners came with us, his pipe in his pocket, smelling dreadfully. He wandered around the clean white deck, looking at this and that, spinning the wheel, examining the patent windlass, and looking aloft at the clean yellow spars and top-hamper.

Then, in my presence, he asked Hawley if he would sell the yacht for the insurance value, forty thousand dollars. Hawley declined with a conciliatory smile, and the proposition, when reported to the ladies, amused them exceedingly.

Then we got under way, and, with the first plunge of the yacht into the sea, Manners sought the lee scuppers amidships, and remained there, an object of pity and derision to the rest. Only the sailing-master was kind to him, bringing him a cot on which he could lie, and ministering to his comfort to the extent of his power—which was not much. He was an employee of Hawley, hired to handle the yacht,

answer questions of the guests, and be civil and obliging.

As Hawley had predicted, it was a delightful experience, the yacht plunging into the combers, shattering them to spray, rising and falling to the lift and the heave of the sea, while the brisk salt wind blew upon us, clearing our minds, banishing from us all perplexing thought of business, money, and the cares and burdens of life—and of poor, unfortunate Manners, still in love with Miss Ellsworth, and seasick in the scuppers.

But Miss Ellsworth, too, was seasick; not so badly as was Manners, just enough to necessitate her lying down on the companion seat for a time, while Hawley showed her all the attention and devotion of an ardent lover, sending his steward for pillows, rugs, and coffee. She recovered soon, and sat up.

"Are you better now," asked Hawley sympathetically.

"Oh, yes," she answered, with a grateful smile. "It has passed away; but is it not the worst sensation? I have never experienced anything like it in my life."

"Exactly as a boy feels after his first smoke," said Hawley. "Let me get you some more coffee."

He went below after his steward, and Miss Ellsworth glanced toward Manners, big and quiet on his cot. The smile left her face and she arose.

"Is no one doing anything for him?" she asked. She resolutely stepped along the reeling deck toward him, and I followed; for she might need assistance, walking was so difficult.

"Is there anything I can do, Mr. Manners?" she asked kindly, as she leaned over him.

"No, thank you," he answered feebly. "It has to wear off."

She stood erect and turned, looking me full in the eyes. There was a defiant, yet embarrassed, look in her face, and a heightened color in her cheek.

"Let me assist you back, Miss Ellsworth," I said. "I will get him some coffee."

She declined my arm, and unaided, returned to her seat. Again I won-

dered if she had meant me, and not Old Lady Summers. But I secured Manners his coffee.

We slept that night peacefully, serenely, and well satisfied with ourselves. Manners showed up at breakfast, bleary-eyed and weak, and all he wanted was a cup of coffee. He even asked for two; but that marked the extent of his energies that day. He ate nothing, and lolled around the deck, pale and dejected, such a wet blanket on our spirits that even Hawley admitted that it was a mistake to invite him.

But the wind came briskly off the land, beating down the sea, and that night died down altogether; so that we began the third day with a dead calm, and by noon Manners was himself again. He ate a hearty dinner, and stamped up and down, smoking his pipe, looking daggers at those of us who had laughed at him, and occasionally at Miss Ellsworth with that pitiful, doglike expression in his eyes.

But there was another man among us who walked the deck that day, fully as unhappy and wretched as was Manners. And there was a young woman who remained most of the morning in her stateroom, and only appeared at dinner when Hawley had finished and excused himself. I knew why, for I had inadvertently blundered upon them the evening before as they stood in the shadow of the mainmast. And in that moment of time, before I could take myself out of hearing, while I only distinguished the pleading accents of his voice, I distinctly heard Miss Ellsworth say: "No, no, it is useless."

And so Hawley was rejected. And, as though there was a fellow feeling established, he joined Manners in his walk for a short time—that is, until Manners left him to lean moodily against the mainmast and stare at a peculiar appearance of the sky over the land.

The sailing-master drew near, and said, either to him, or to Hawley, who was passing in his restless walk.

"Looks like a white squall, sir. Doesn't it?"

But it was Hawley who answered,

irritably: "If you think it's a white squall, captain, prepare for it."

"Yes, sir," answered the captain, studying the portent for a moment longer. Then, funneling his hands, he roared forward: "All hands!"

It is unusual for yacht captains to make so much noise; as Hawley had often explained, it was not good form, and annoyed the guests. But this man was in earnest, and no sooner had his men responded to his call than he let go the main gaff topsail sheet, close to his hand at the fife rail. The men flocked to stations, and the mate hurried aft to the captain's side for orders.

And now a strange thing happened. The captain still held the sheet in his hand, and stood with one foot on the coil as he had dropped it to the deck. Before he could loosen his grip on the rope he was jerked upward; then as he slipped down his feet were caught by the up-running spiral of rope, he was turned over in air, and he crashed down head first onto the shoulders of the mate, their two skulls coming into contact with a violence that sounded over the screaming of the wind. Both fell to the deck unconscious, and a few of the men ran to their assistance.

It was a vicious, rainless fury of wind that had seemed to come down from above, ruffling the smooth sea on all sides of us at once, and then assuming a lateral direction from squarely abeam. The sheets were hauled aft, and the yacht began to heel, while the gaff topsail above flapped and thrashed like a huge flag. Hawley clung to the mainmast, screaming women and frightened men clung to deck fittings, and Manners gained the weather rail, and looked around.

"Hard up your wheel!" he roared to the helmsman, who answered and obeyed. "Go aft, a couple of you, and slack off that main sheet." Two men ran to obey this order. "Clew up fore and main gaff topsails, and haul down the jib topsail and flying jib," he continued, and these other sails also flapped and thrashed in the wind.

Still the yacht heeled, farther and farther.

"Your officers are injured," he called to Hawley, white-faced and limp at the mainmast. "Have you any suggestions to offer?"

Hawley weakly shook his head.

"Then," said Manners, "I assume charge of this yacht in the name of the company that I represent. Drag them up to the weather rail and make 'em fast," he called to the men near the two officers. And then, in a thundering roar: "What's the matter with that main sheet?"

"Jammed on the cavil, sir," answered the men who had gone aft. "Can't get it clear."

Manners slid down to the fore-sheet cavil and found the same conditions; the light booms were high in air, and the sheets nearly perpendicular. It was a supreme moment. With no steerage-way the yacht would not pay off, and the water was creeping higher and higher up the slanting deck and pouring into the open deadlights in a manner that threatened to sink her.

Manners secured an ax from its place on a skylight, and crept back to the weather main rigging, where he mounted the rail.

"Stand clear!" he shouted. "Get away from the mainmast, Hawley!"

But Hawley hung on, staring stupidly around him. Down came the ax on the after lanyard, and the backstay sprang into the air like a whip-lash, while the topmast, released from support, sagged like a bow. Again was the ax poised, again it came down, and the after shroud sprang upward and dangled, held by the ratlines. Twice more that big, strong man flourished the ax; then the mainmast, breaking about ten feet above Hawley's head, crashed over the side, taking with it the fore topmast. Manners put the ax in its place and came aft to the man at the wheel, while the yacht, gathering headway, slowly paid off and righted.

"Keep her dead before it!" shouted Manners to the man at the wheel. Then, after a glance at the compass: "Make it sou'east by east, half east."

"Sou'east and by east, half east, sir," answered the man respectfully.

Then Manners cast a protective look around the group of guests. We were all right, though badly frightened, and Manners went forward to Hawley, still clinging to the stump of the mainmast, and led him aft, where he clung just as tightly to the binnacle.

The men had carried the two unconscious officers to their berths, and Manners, in charge of the yacht, stood close to the helmsman, advising and assisting him. The dragging wreck made steering difficult, and the foresail, slatting from side to side, did not assist matters.

Manners lifted his thundering voice to the men forward: "Lay aft here, the cox'ain o' the gig!"

This man came on a run.

"You will act mate and take your orders from me," he said to him. "Tell all hands that they are on double pay. Get that foresail in, and come aft wi' the crowd."

"Aye, aye, sir," answered the coxswain, and hurried forward.

Manners was transformed. He seemed several inches taller. From being the despised, pitied, ignorant victim of seasickness and dislike he had become a person of importance—whom the sailors obeyed without question. Not one hesitated to jump at his roaring behest; not one seemed to doubt that he knew what he was doing, or counted against him his pitiable condition when seasick.

He commanded the yacht and all she contained. He ordered the ladies off the deck, and they went below. He ordered Hawley away from the binnacle so that the man at the wheel could see the compass, and Hawley followed the ladies. He ordered the gentlemen to assist the crew in getting the wreck of the mainmast inboard when they came aft, and we obeyed him. We worked like heroes, imbued with an immense respect for Bad Manners, and when the squall had died away, and a gentle breeze came out of the north, we manned the fore throat and peak halliards with the men, and pulled lustily.

Bad Manners hardly moved from his

position near the wheel; he sent that mighty voice of his after us, and it reached us wherever we were. He made a landfall before dark, recognized it, and shaped a course for Boston, not even asking us if we would like to be put off at the exclusive hotel.

And Hawley could not understand. He thought that Manners' nautical erudition had come from his tutelage, and his assuming command in that manner nothing but the workings of a bad, arrogant disposition. But the first mate enlightened him, as he lay in his berth, the first to recover from that stunning collision of heads.

"Why, didn't you know, Mr. Hawley?" he said. "That's Captain Manners. He commanded a ship at twenty, but he quit the sea because he's too smart a man for the business, and, I guess, because he never could get over being seasick. Some men can't get over it. I've known several."

"But what's his business now?" asked the astounded Hawley.

"He's a shipowner now, and I think he holds down a job in some big insurance company, vice-president, general manager, or something like that."

"He's an infernal hypocrite," exploded Hawley, turning away.

However, it was as a born commander of men that Manners interested me now. I think that born commanders must exercise their prerogative to get what they want out of life; they never get it by asking or pleading, no matter how heartfelt their need.

His last command on board that yacht was to Miss Ellsworth, just as she was stepping ashore at Boston; and I was within hearing. He planted himself squarely in front of her, looked her intently in the eyes, and commanded:

"Say yes."

"Yes," she responded, with a smile.

Then she turned suddenly to me, while the smile left her face, and the defiant, embarrassed expression it had worn in the lee scuppers came back to it. Then I knew she had meant me and not Old Lady Summers. She misjudged me but—God bless her!